

The following story appeared in [National Journal](#) on May 1, 2010.

Democratic Rep. Mike Quigley of Illinois holds a seat formerly occupied by two politicians at the center of infamous political corruption scandals -- now-indicted former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich and convicted felon Dan Rostenkowski. So perhaps it is no surprise that the freshman, who won the seat in a special election after former Rep. Rahm Emanuel resigned to become White House chief of staff, has made deterring corruption a central theme of his first year in Washington.

In March, Quigley, who was a member of the Cook County Board of Commissioners for 10 years before heading to Congress, co-founded the Congressional Transparency Caucus. He also introduced legislation that would require lobbyists to disclose the name of each affected executive branch official and member of Congress and staff with whom they meet, and would direct the Government Accountability Office to investigate whether unregistered lobbyists are working Capitol Hill. The measure would also compel more lobbyists to register and require them to report on campaign activity four times a year instead of two.

On April 27, Quigley, talked with *National Journal* about his legislation. Edited excerpts follow.

**NJ: What are you trying to accomplish with your bill?**

**Quigley:** It is very hard to make tough decisions and it's hard to lead if the public doesn't trust you. If a constituent knows what you are doing, knows you are accessible and you are working hard, even if they disagree with you, they know you are doing your job. But if they don't trust you and don't know what you are doing, no matter what decision you make, it will be hard to lead.

Transparency is the first step back to redemption. If there was more transparency and the public had faith that [corruption] would be rooted out quickly and not allowed to simmer, then I think people would have more faith in both parties.

**NJ: Aren't you tilting at windmills in trying to change Washington?**

**Quigley:** When I was running for the Cook County Commission, people told me, you'll never change anything, and people won't remember you. It took me a few years, but if you read the *Chicago Tribune*, they said I changed the face of the county and opened up government. It's so much more complicated [in Washington], and there are so many more layers of institutional and cultural resistance, and I'm still learning how difficult it is to push for things. But I have faith.

**NJ: Why make lobbyists part of your transparency bill?**

**Quigley:** Lobbyists aren't a bad thing. I respect that every interest has a right to be represented on the Hill by lobbyists. I tell my constituents, you may not like the pharmaceutical lobbyist or the tobacco lobbyist, but your school system has someone here, and the cancer society has someone here. People don't understand that lobbyists advocate, educate, and inform -- and that is super-important. I can hire a great staff, but lobbyists have some of the best information.

**NJ:** Will people outside of Washington ever understand that?

**Quigley:** No. There is an old adage in Illinois politics: If you have to explain, you are in trouble. So when we are dealing with transparency reform, lobbyists may feel like they're being picked on, and they may have a point, but they are part of the legislative process. To reform the entire process, they must be included.

**NJ:** Under your bill, lobbyists would have to disclose each member of Congress and aide they meet with. Many lobbyists think that would be a nightmare because in the course of living and working, they run into staffers and lawmakers at non-official or fundraising events, or they even know them socially. What do you say?

**Quigley:** I don't think anything that we are proposing impairs lobbyists' ability to do their work. They should embrace this. If the perception [of the profession] is negative -- and I will say they are right that some of that perception isn't fair and that the public doesn't understand the role that lobbyists play -- if I'm a lobbyist, I wouldn't call this [measure] insane. I'd embrace this and say, "What we do is important and just to tell you that there is nothing wrong, we are going to open it up [to the public] until you believe that."

**NJ:** Instead of putting the burden on lobbyists, why not make lawmakers post the names of everyone they meet with in an official capacity?

**Quigley:** What you are getting at is what I'd like to think the Transparency Caucus will do. We'll have discussions like this about what we should do. We have a forum to create an atmosphere of bipartisan culture, because if there is one issue that is bipartisan, it had better be ethics, transparency, and accountability.

**NJ:** Many people think that fixing the campaign finance system is more important than reforming Congress through the legislative process. What do you think?

**Quigley:** I agree. You pick your issues where you can. We will get to [that].

**NJ: How have your colleagues received your proposal?**

**Quigley:** The number of folks interested in this is disappointingly low. I just don't understand, from a pure political point of view, even if your heart isn't in it, [why] you wouldn't be all over it. I think one of the reasons people stay away from ethics issues is that they don't want to appear sanctimonious. From a leadership point of view, the resistance is that if you embrace reform, it's seen as an indication that something is wrong, so that puts reform at a disadvantage.

**NJ: Do you have any co-sponsors on your bill?**

**Quigley:** We just sent out our "Dear Colleague" [letter], and we don't have a reaction yet.

**NJ: The administration has given a lot of attention to lobbying reform. Are you working with the White House on this?**

**Quigley:** Yes. I'm dealing with my [fellow Chicagoans and White House advisers David Axelrod and Jonathan Samuels]. We went to the White House and asked for their help on the legislation, and we have handed it to them and we are in discussions with them.